THE GLADSTONE REVIEW

an occasional e-journal

July **2025:** ***Issue No. 22***

Informal commentary, opinions, reviews, news, illustrations and poetry for bookish people of philanthropic inclination

Contents

Editorial

Surely, as experienced in all our lives, the political effects reverberating throughout the world from the changes induced in the USA by Mr Trump's re-election as president are affecting everything from personal liberty to alleged national genocide, from kindly cooperation to aggressive deal-making. Almost inevitably, in this issue of the Review revisiting the ideology of *democracy* seems urgent - what it means, its alleged benefits and costs - and to what degree it is now considered a viable political system. Three articles address these questions - one by my regular contributor, and son, Jim.

In contrast, the remarkable, but unsung, intellectual achievements of George Boole FRS, whose education in Lincoln was virtually self-taught, are given merited recognition.

On a quite different tack, this year marks the tenth anniversary of the Review, albeit then referred to as a newsletter, and published monthly. In celebration, in the next few issues, I intend to reproduce some articles published during those ten years - two of contrasting nature in this issue. And I have dropped *New* from the title. This issue also includes part 2 of my *Octogenerial Reflections*, which were introduced in issue 21.

Finally, a gentle reminder. I would welcome more visits to my book room, which regularly receives gratifying plaudits, but disappointingly makes rather few sales.

Phone 01636 814889 to book an appointment

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2. TRUMPERY

The last issue of this Review appeared in February, a time when many (probably, most) of the world's people were unaware of the likely impact on global politics and economics of the recent election of Donald Trump as US president. Prognostications of imminent and dramatic changes, not only for the people in the USA, but for the whole international scene, had been adumbrated by the cognoscenti, but a sense of mistaken optimism for the success of Kamala Harris had lulled many into a state of impending relief. But with Trump's stated intentions (in a crude corruption of Omar Khayyam's lyrical verse) - '*to grasp this sorry scheme of things entire, would not we shatter it to bits and then re-mould it nearer to the heart's desire!*' - the demolition of democracy, as we imagined it, was now on the line

Regular readers of this Review will be aware that in the last issue (No 21) I included a copy of my email to Mr Jenrick MP, requesting information concerning his views on this matter. Here I reproduce the relevant parts of that email. Despite receiving a prompt reply acknowledging its receipt I have received no response to my questions from Mr Jenrick or his office in the last six months.

Dear Mr Jenrick

As a resident in the constituency of which you are the MP, I am interested in your opinions on the programme set out by Mr Trump in his presidential inaugural speech. My interest in these is especially relevant both because I understand you supported Mr Trump's presidential candidacy and because of your current positions as Shadow Secretary of State for Justice and Shadow Lord Chancellor, as well as being a leading contender for the role of Conservative Party leader in 2024.

The crucial influence of future US political decisions on far-reaching global concerns means that for everyone now alive, as well as for future generations, national governments need to adapt to the doubtless monumental impending changes that will inevitably ensue. Consequently, among others, I would welcome knowing your views on:

- *the decision to leave the World Health Organisation*
- *the pardon granted to 1,500 US citizens who attacked the US Capitol on 06.01.2021*
- *the decision to resign from the Paris Climate Agreement*

.....

In association with this, quite small, book business, I produce an occasional e- journal- The Gladstone Review- which is accessible via the website www.gladstonebooks.co.uk. While its overall theme is with cultural and philanthropic concerns, it also occasionally carries, in a nonpartisan way, some articles at the political interface. Its circulation is probably quite low, but I would be happy to post your reply to my above queries. To meet the deadline for the next issue, I should appreciate a reply at your earliest convenience.

With thanks in anticipation of your reply,

Yours sincerely

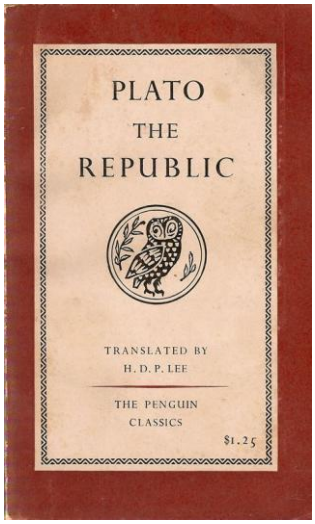
Prof Ben Mepham

3. PLATO AND CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRACY

Winston Churchill famously said that 'democracy is the worst form of government-except for all the others that have been tried'.

The last time you had a troubling medical symptom, what did you do? Maybe you waited, hoping it would go away on its own. But eventually, I bet you asked a doctor and I bet you took their advice. Instead, you could have invited a dozen people from your city to a town hall meeting, asked what they think you should do about the symptoms, and followed whatever suggestion was most popular. But of course, public opinion is no substitute for a competent doctor. It would be odd to trust a random group of people over a doctor when it comes to your health! But isn't this exactly what a democracy does with the health of the country?

If you think looking after your own health is complicated, imagine how complicated it is to ensure the health of everyone. Democracies leave difficult decisions as how much to tax, whether to go to war, what freedoms to guarantee, to the people. If it's foolish to trust ordinary people with one person's health, isn't it much more foolish to trust them with the health of an entire society? The Ancient Greek philosopher Plato opposed democracy for this reason. The Greek word for democracy can be translated as "rule by the people," but it can also mean "rule by the mob." He thought that the problem with democracy is that when you put the people in charge, you're entrusting the health of your entire society to people who don't know what they're doing and who are inclined to act foolishly. It's fairly obvious that amateurs make a lot more mistakes than experts.



But what's more, Plato argued, democracy contains the seeds of its own destruction. Suppose your doctor told you that as you had a heart problem you had to eliminate salt from your diet. That would be a big sacrifice but one you'd be willing to make to save your life. After leaving your doctor's surgery, you run into someone who gives the impression, from the confident way he talks, that he's got a better way of dealing with your heart problem, claiming that "If you take these dietary supplements with every meal you can consume all the salt you want!" Since taking a pill is easier than changing your diet, you might well be tempted to follow this easier advice - not appreciating that the 'dietary supplement' is a scam.

In a democracy, bad actors can pose as experts in ruling and gain political support through rhetoric, lies, and manipulation. Arguably, we need to look no further than Trump, Orban, Marcos, Netanyahu and others. Since many people can't distinguish real experts from fakes, a skilful faker could gain real power through demagoguery. Unchecked, demagogues eventually become tyrants. Only when it's too late to stop them, is their true nature revealed. They hold on to power by any means they deem necessary: fixing elections, media manipulation, dismissal of rights, stirring up war, and incarcerating their enemies. So Plato's argument is that democracies produce tyrants, and tyrants destroy societies.

Democracy can lead inevitably by its own collapse into something far, far worse. It's hard to deny that Plato was onto something. After all, Hitler came to power through democratic

means, by skilfully manipulating the resentments of the German middle class. Nazism is, of course, far from the only example in history. So do we need experts *in charge* ? Plato thought that philosophers were best suited for this role. In *The Republic*, Plato argued that "There will be no end to the troubles of the state, or indeed of humanity, until philosophers become kings or until those we now call kings really and truly become philosophers."

He proposed radical reforms, with part of his plan being to put philosophers in charge. For him, society's so-called *Guardians* would live in military-style housing, own no private property, never marry or have families. Their early education would focus on music, maths, and military science, before several years of philosophical study. Only then would they have sufficient knowledge and wisdom to rule well. Plato's proposal might seem extremely unrealistic, even ridiculously utopian. It also seems even less stable than democracy: For one thing, some doctors can be motivated by self-interest as much as anyone else. Thus, a well-educated guardian could abuse the system just as well as a rabble-rousing demagogue. But what questions does Plato's view of democracy, give rise to?

- Plato thought that choosing candidates carefully and training them rigorously in virtue would protect society from self-serving guardians. Do politicians need specific training and education on moral and ethical issues?
- What codes of ethics are in place for elected politicians and do they work? What checks and balances work to prevent authoritarian backsliding?
- Still, an even deeper question remains: Who is an expert in ruling?

Plato discusses leadership in descriptive ways. He says that a good leader should be like a doctor who cares for the good of her patients. He/she should be like a navigator of a ship who has to steer the state through periods of change and unpredictability and like an artist looking to a model of justice, order and harmony, and seeking to fashion society in its image. Plato says a good ruler should also be a teacher. Leadership of this kind involves appealing to people's rationality. It requires being open to the evidence, responsive to questioning and willing to listen.

Finally, says Plato, a good ruler must be like a weaver and a sower. The weaver weaves the citizens together into a unified social fabric and the sower nurtures living, critical dialogue among their followers. He compares the process to sowing seeds in the right places and in the right way, seeds that will grow into plants, which in turn create new seeds, so that the process can go on in perpetuity. There are clearly many problems with his solution, e.g. pluralistic societies produce many "experts in ruling" most or all of whom disagree. Does it make sense to talk of an expert in morality? Moreover, what is the relationship between freedom and responsibility in a democracy? How far are an awareness of citizenship, politics and philosophy embedded in teaching in schools? What are the key values and vision of a good society?

Perhaps the best we can hope for is for the two extreme definitions discussed above to be combined in appropriate ways - in order to arrive at the 'best-worst options.'

Jim Mepham is a former School Headteacher. He currently teaches adult education Philosophy courses and workshops in Bristol and leads the Bristol U3A Philosophy group.

4. YOUNG EUROPEANS ARE LOSING FAITH IN DEMOCRACY

A recently published report[1] (the ninth annual survey by the You Gov institute on the opinions of Europe's generation Z - i.e. aged between 16 and 26 years), reveals that, although the majority prefer democracy to any other form of government, there is much variation between different countries. In the study, which was carried out in April and May of this year, more than 6,700 young people in Britain, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Greece and Poland responded to the questionnaire. While, overall, 57% prefer democracy to any other form of government, degrees of support were only 48% in Poland and 51-52% in Spain and France. Germany recorded the highest level at 71%.

Looked at from the dissenting end of the spectrum, more than one in five – 21% – would favour authoritarian rule under certain, unspecified circumstances. This was highest in Italy at 24% and lowest in Germany with 15%, with France, Spain and Poland each registering 23%.

Thorsten Faas, a political scientist at Berlin's Free University, who worked on the study, said: *Among people who see themselves as politically to the right of centre and feel economically disadvantaged, their support of democracy sinks to just one in three*. In his opinion, *Democracy is under pressure, from within and without*.

The return of Donald Trump to the White House, the rise of China, and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine have shifted power away from Europe in the respondents' perception, with just 42% counting the EU among the top three global players. Despite (or perhaps because of Brexit), the figure was highest among Britons at 50%. Of those surveyed in the UK, 73% wanted a return to the EU, while nearly half of young Europeans (47%) sought stronger ties between the EU and Britain.

These are important insights, but changing or different ideas on how democracy is defined are clearly crucial - witness those advanced by Plato in the accompanying article.

Questions concerning democracy (Issue No. 19, February 2024)

In that context, it is worth referring to my article written for the Review eighteen months ago, with the above title (and accessible via the website), in which I addressed three concerns:

Suffrage: which raised the question of who should be granted the vote in elections. I suggested that *an enquiry should be set up into the justice of the current arrangements.*

Secondly, on *Advertising*, my recommendation was that there is a strong case for stricter regulation of the money spent on advertising and for the banning of false claims.

Thirdly, on *Competence*, the questions of who is qualified to vote, and to what extent their opinions are respected, need to be considered by an independent enquiry.

Footnote: ***The vast majority of us, with good reason, only get one vote. But metaphorically, and realistically, it seems to be the case one man has the equivalent of billions of votes - legally! At least in the UK, the recent 'rebellion' of Labour MPs is evidence that their conscience can still, openly, challenge the official party line.***

BM

[1] Young Europeans losing faith in democracy, poll finds | Young people | The Guardian

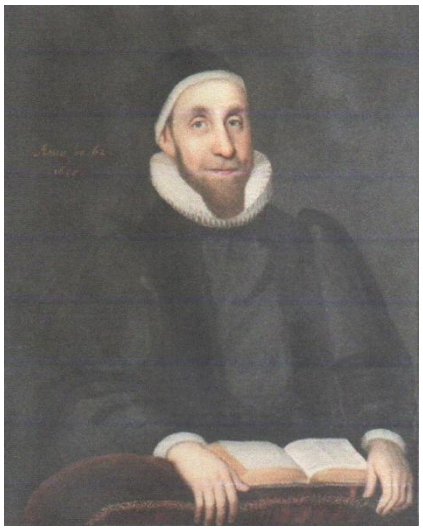
5. THE ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY

by Robert Burton: the *magnum opus* of a 17th century polymath

Reproduced from Issue No 10 (October 2020)

The effects of the Covid19 pandemic have been so pervasive that there has been a tendency to concentrate on the more dramatic ways in which it has affected our wellbeing; ways in which, however difficult to quantify accurately, it has led to increased mortality and severe financial crises. However, rather less newsworthy ways in which it has impacted on society as a whole are the consequences for mental health. A recent authoritative study revealed that '***More than two-thirds of adults in the UK report feeling somewhat or very worried about the effect COVID-19 is having on their lives.*** *The most common issues affecting wellbeing* (of over half of adults) *are worry about the future and feeling stressed or anxious.* It proceeded *all population subgroups showed statistically significant increases in mental health problems,* which *were most pronounced among young adults, females, and those with a higher level of education* (e.g. graduates) and were *greater among those aged 18-34 than 50 – 64.'*[2]

But, devastating as the pandemic has been, and continues to be, it would be naive to imagine that humanity has not previously faced major threats that, in many cases, were far worse than Covid19. For example, life expectancy in the UK in the 17th century was about 40 years, whereas now it is about 90 years. Is it conceivable that we might learn something useful from the 'wisdom of the ages' in coping with the condition formerly known as *melancholia*?[3]



Our most notable, and prolix, guide in that quest would surely be Robert Burton, a 17th century polymath who wrote *The Anatomy of Melancholy* which, in the words of literary critic Nicholas Lezzard, is surely *the best book ever written: the book to end all books!.* [4] Drawing on all the knowledge then recorded and available, Burton set out to explain and account for, not just melancholy (in modern terminology now dubbed *clinical depression*) but also for *all* human emotion and thought. Such an ambitious project, that was to encompass virtually all aspects of human thought and emotion, was surely only realisable by someone with a prodigious depth of learning and uncommon stamina. In fact, it proved to be a veritable masterpiece of style and an invaluable guide to the philosophical and psychological ideas of the time.

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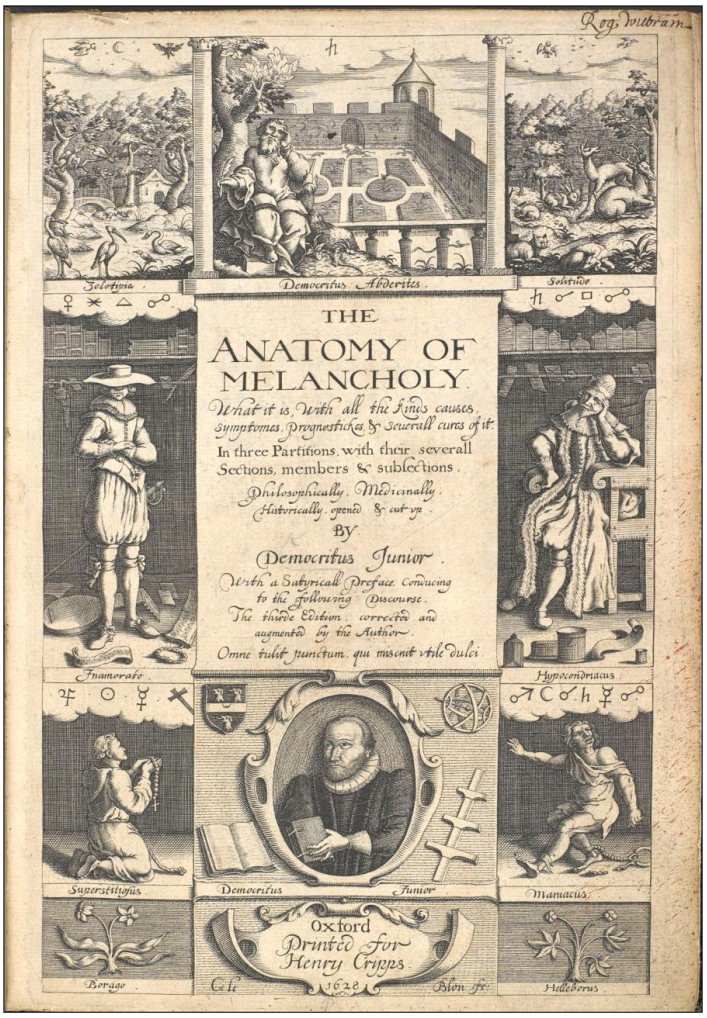
[2] *Longitudinal changes in mental health and the COVID-19 pandemic: evidence from the UK Household Longitudinal Study (*2020). https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/qd5z7

[3] A mental condition characterized by *great depression of spirits and gloomy forebodings*. Translated literally, as 'black bile', it refers to one of the four body *humours* (along with blood, phlegm and yellow bile) described in ancient Greek medicine, the appropriate balance between which was crucial in maintaining a healthy state.

[4] N Lezzard (2001) *The book to end all books* Guardian newspaper18.08.01. (Review)

Burton was born in 1577 at Lindley in Leicestershire, a village near the Warwickshire border. After school in Nuneaton and at Sutton Coldfield Grammar School, he entered Brasenose College at Oxford University. In 1599 he was elected a Life Fellow of Christ Church, the college where he spent virtually the rest of his life, and where he wrote *The Anatomy*. He became a bachelor of divinity in 1614, vicar of St. Thomas's Church, Oxford in 1616, and was also appointed rector of the parish church at Seagrave in Leicestershire –incidentally, a village a mere six miles from where I lived with my young family in the 1970s, although at the time I was unaware of this historic association.

The first edition of the book was published in 1621, but revisions and amendments led to him producing five more editions, the last in 1676. Despite its title, the book was clearly not meant to be concerned solely with medical matters. The full subtitle was *What it (melancholy) is; with all the Kindes, Causes, Symptomes, Prognostickes and Several Cures of it: In Three Maine Partitions With Their Several Sections, Members, and Subsections, Philosophically, Medicinally, Historically Opened and Cut up.*



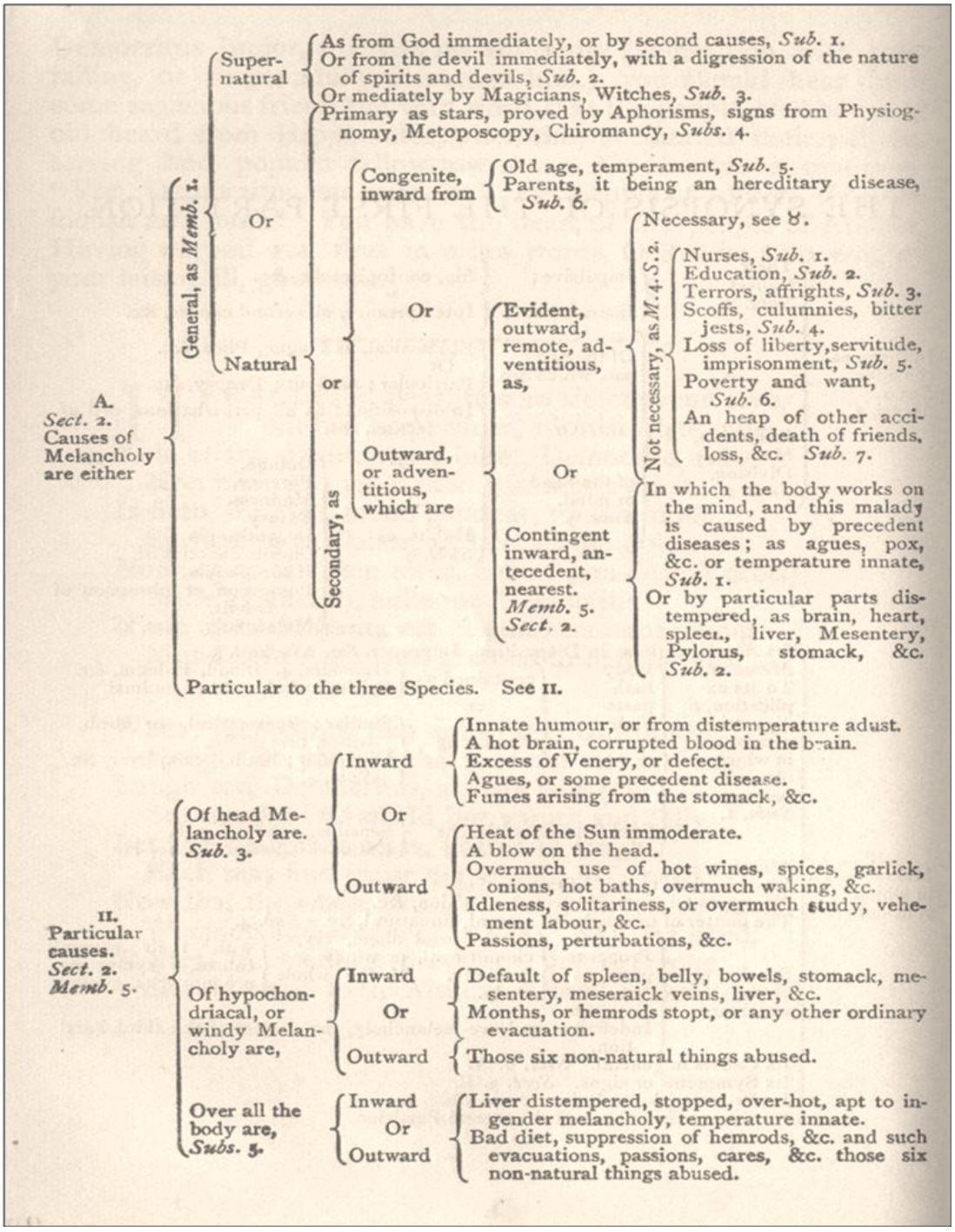
As the frontispiece (shown here, which first appeared in the 1628 edition) announces, it was written by Democritus Junior. Burton adopted this *nom de plume* to identify with the character of the ancient Greek philosopher, who used to recreate himself by laughing at the absurdities he encountered on his walks. Similarly, Burton used to repair to the bridge foot at Oxford and listen to the bargemen swearing at one another – at which he would laugh most profusely. For he claimed that he wrote of melancholy to avoid melancholy. .

At the top of the title page is a representation of Democritus and, below the title, one of Burton. The images at the sides illustrate the effects of *Love Madness, Hypochondriasis, Religious Melancholy and Mania* , while at the top corners are the herbs *borage* and *hellebore, esteemed for their powers against Melancholy and Madness.*[5] But the book doesn't just describe Burton's thoughts on melancholy, but

[5] Here, and subsequently, most quotations from the text are italicised

those of everyone who had ever thought about it, or indeed about supposedly related things, such as goblins, beauty, the geography of America, digestion, the passions, drink, kissing, jealousy, and scholarship!

In truth, he opines: *'tis the common fortune of most scholars to be servile and poor, to complain pitifully, and lay open their wants to their respective patrons and for hope*



One of the four pages of the Synopsis of the First Partition of Volume 1

of gain to lie, flatter, and with hyperbolical elogiums and commendations to magnify and extol an illiterate unworthy idiot for his excellent virtues, whom they should rather, as Machiavel observes, vilify and rail at downright for his most notorious

villainies and vices.' But it is apparent that Burton is definitely on the side of the angels, that he's prepared to be controversial and (the saving grace) he can be very amusing. As he himself described it, Burton led a silent, sedentary and solitary life. But he was certainly not a scholar who was remote from the affairs of humanity. For it is obvious that he was as well aware of the common habits and pastimes of his day as he was of the ideas of the ancients and, for example, as eager to recommend a rational diet to alleviate ill temper as he was to relate human disorders to his own essentially Christian view of the universe.

What is perhaps most distinctive about Burton's analysis is the painstaking way he marshalled his arguments within a complex logical framework. In the first part he set out to define melancholy, discuss its causes, and then catalogue the symptoms. The second part is devoted to ways in which it might be treated, while Love Melancholy is the subject of a major portion of the third part.

Throughout the book, Burton shows himself to be a supreme narrator and the source of countless *bon mots*. But to represent an example of his style, we shall have to be content with just one quotation, which appears in volume 3, pages 164-5 of my 1926 edition.[6]

Melancholy, the subject of our present discourse, is either in disposition or habit. In disposition, is that transitory Melancholy which goes and comes upon every small occasion of sorrow, need, sickness, trouble, fear, grief, passion, or perturbation of the mind, any manner of care, discontent, or thought, which causes anguish, dullness, heaviness and vexation of spirit, any ways opposite to pleasure, mirth, joy, delight, causing frowardness in us, or a dislike. In which equivocal and proper sense, we call him melancholy, that is dull, sad, sour, lumpish, ill-disposed, solitary, any way moved or displeased.

And from these melancholy dispositions, no man living is free, no Stoick, none so wise, none so happy, none so patient, so generous, so godly, so divine, that can vindicate himself; so well-composed, but more or less, some time or other, he feels the smart of it. Melancholy in this sense is the character of Mortality. Man that is born of a woman is of short continuance and full of trouble. Zeno, Cato, Socrates himself, whom Aelian so highly commends for a moderate temper, that nothing could disturb him; but going out and coming in, still Socrates kept the same serenity of countenance, what misery soever befell him (if we believe Plato his disciple) was much tormented with it.

Even in the midst of laughing there is sorrow, even in the midst of all our feasting and jollity, there is grief and discontent. If thou canst not brook it there is no way to avoid it, but to arm thyself with patience, with magnanimity, to oppose thyself unto it, to suffer affliction as a good soldier of Christ, Paul adviseth, constantly to bear it

Despite this brusque advice, Burton fills nearly 1400 more pages expanding on the causes, nature and cures for melancholy!

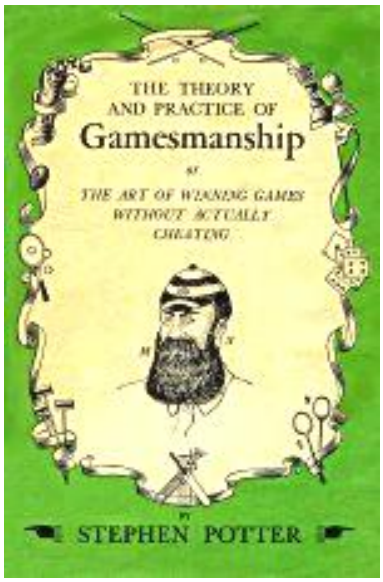
BM

[6] *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. in three volumes, (introduction by A H Bullen, 1893) G Bell.

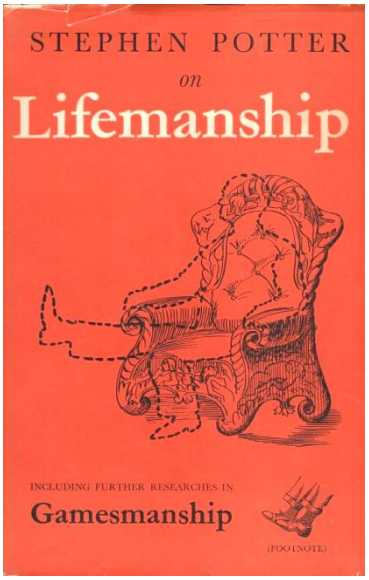
6. STEPHEN POTTER AND THE *UPMANSHIP* BOOKS

Reproduced from Issue No 2 (February 2017)

People of a certain age might well succumb to a wry, and probably involuntary, smile when they note the title of this piece. For in the 1950s Potter attracted a cult following for his series of ostensibly 'self-help' guides - which in reality were prime examples of the self-effacing humour affected by members of the 'educated' class in adapting to a more egalitarian post-war world. It was Potter's *Gamesmanship* (written in 1947), with its subtitle *or the art of winning games without actually cheating* that set the distinctive style for the succeeding three books. And it immediately won plaudits from the most discerning critics. Thus, J B Priestley commented *For successful solemn drollery, it is the Book of the Year,* while John Betjeman opined that *it was easily the funniest book* he had read that year.



Potter claimed (on page 12) that the origin of gamesmanship was a tennis match on 8th June, 1931, in which he and the philosopher C E M Joad (of *Brains Trust* fame), were playing two students at University College London[7], and being outplayed with relative ease. In an effort to unnerve the students, Joad hit the ball straight into the back-netting a good 12 feet behind the back-line, and while their opponents were preparing for the next serve, he called across the net, in an even tone: *Kindly state clearly, whether the ball was in or out*. Being suitably deferential to their distinguished elders the students offered to replay the point, but Joad declined.



Because they were young and polite, this veiled implication that their etiquette and sportsmanship were in question proved to be very off-putting, and so-effectively distracted them for the rest of the match that Potter and Joad managed to win it! Potter proceeded: *That night I thought hard and long. Could not this simple gambit of Joad's be extended to include other aspects of the game - to include all games*? For me it was the birth of gamesmanship.[8]

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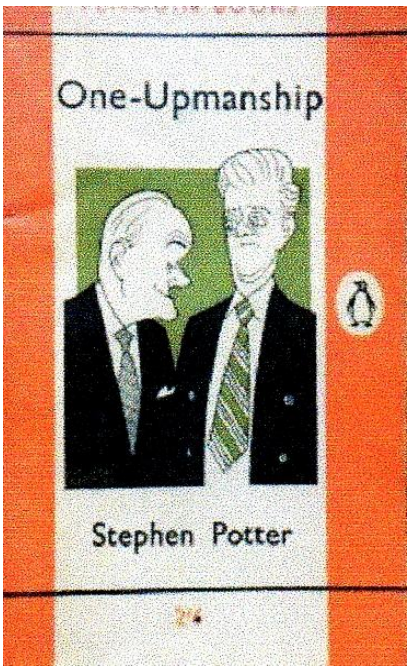
[7] As it happens, my *alma mater* - though well before my time!

[8] Unfortunately, Joad's gamesmanship sometimes went too far, for having declared *'I cheat the railway company whenever I can,'* in 1948 he was fined just £2 for fare-dodging. But this effectively finished his academic and broadcasting careers.

It's clear that I can provide no more than a very few examples of the sardonic tone adopted in these books. But collectively they may acquaint the unfamiliar with a sense of Potter's arcane style, while reminding others of how wittily supercilious it all seemed at the time. Take, for example, the following excerpt from his chapter on Week-Endmanship that appeared in *Lifemanship* (the second book in the series). It refers to the 'Grand Lifeman,' G Cogg-Willoughby, who when staying with friends at their Suffolk cottage contrives to earn an unwarranted reputation for selflessness. Immediately the first evening meal is over, 'Cogg' rolls up his sleeves, clears the table in a trice, does all the washing up (this, of course predated modern dish-washers) and, with ungrudging zest, does all the drying up as well. '*Having planted this good impression in the mind of his hostess, for the rest of the week-end Cogg lays not a single finger in the kitchen or garden, nor brings in so much as a single log of firewood from the shed.*'



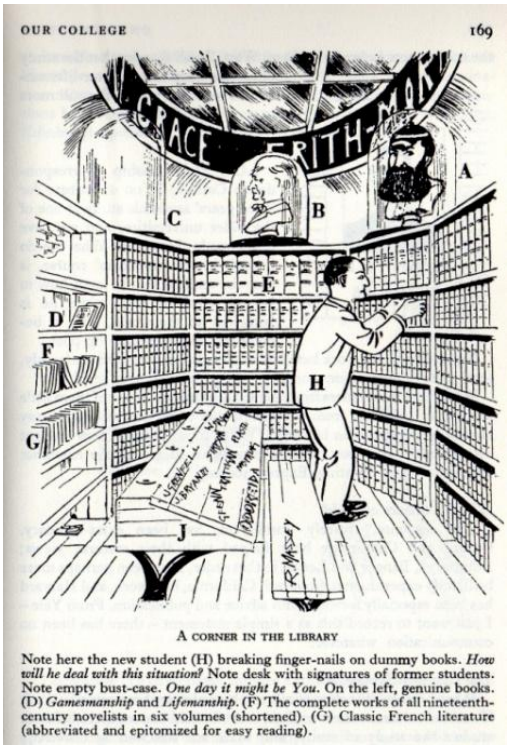
And when it came to games that traditionally featured on such occasions, with the others feebly organising bowls, ping-pong or croquet, Cogg - who was incapable of any kind of sport - would produce an enormous pair of field glasses and declare *Well, I'm going off for my game, see you all later!* Sometimes it was bird watching, sometimes butterflies, occasionally wild flowers, about all of which he was almost entirely ignorant. But a feigned recognition of the call of some fictitious bird (*that's an easy one to recognise - a frog -pippit* - and after a pause - *as I believe they call it in these parts*) would leave the other townie week-enders full of admiration!

A ploy I recall from reading Potter all those years ago, listed as 'telephone managementship,' was recommended for someone aiming to give the impression they ran a major business enterprise when, in fact, they worked alone from the sitting room at home. When the phone rang, the 'lifeman' would get up very slowly to answer it and begin a fictitious conversation with an imaginary secretary, while raising the receiver so that the caller would presume he was interrupting an important conversation. Rubbing the mouthpiece of the receiver against his trouser leg, so muffling the actual speech, would add to the sense that this was a hive of office activity. Eventually our lifeman would speak calmly into the mouthpiece '*Gattling-Fenn* (or somesuch) *here*' - giving the impression that although his minions were hard at work, he, the boss, occupied a plane quite above the hectic activity of his staff!

In *One-Upmanship* Potter introduced his fictional 'Lifemanship Correspondence College,' *housed modestly in a converted section of a converted mansion, yet from the*

files and the classrooms, the laboratories and the libraries (illustrated on left) *Lifemanship throws its lifeline from Alaska in the West to Colchester in the East.*

The final book in the series was *Supermanship*. It concluded with a comment on Cold War tactics, that might have some relevance to our current predicament, in which the trumpeting of hollow phrases often elicits delirious applause.



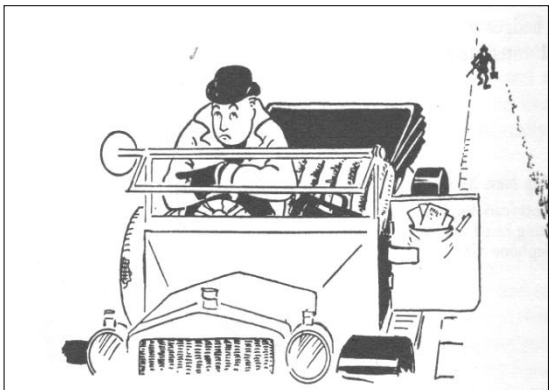
A CORNER IN THE LIBRARY

Note here the new student (H) breaking finger-nails on dummy books. *How will he deal with this situation?* Note desk with signatures of former students. Note empty bust-case. *One day it might be You.* On the left, genuine books. (D) *Gamesmanship* and *Lifemanship*. (F) The complete works of all nineteenth-century novelists in six volumes (shortened). (G) Classic French literature (abbreviated and epitomized for easy reading).

Deducing that the Russian President Khrushkev was an accomplished 'brinkman' (*who had depended for 30 years on diverting attention from the making of lethal weapons by sidelines made to please the public*), Potter opined:

But Khruschev must always be one-up because he uses more words of one syllable. 'End the bomb' can be understood by three quarters of the world: 'Organise a committee for international inspection and mutual restraint' can only be understood by one twentieth of it. 'Summit Conference is very easy to understand': 'Exploratory committee to ensure that a conference is effective is a one-down phrase because it needs thought to understand what it means.'

And yet, the tone of this last book was largely the same as the others, wry satire coupled with self-deprecation. The figure on the right reminds us that in the 1950s car ownership was available to very few. And in close-knit communities owners often felt under an obligation to share their good fortune with neighbours in a way that would be largely unthinkable today.


CORRECT POSITION FOR SUGGESTING:

'I don't in the least mind stopping to pick you up, but if you *could* get a on . . .'

At the time of writing I have for sale more than one copy each of
Gamesmanship and *Lifemanship*. - but unfortunately none of the other two volumes.

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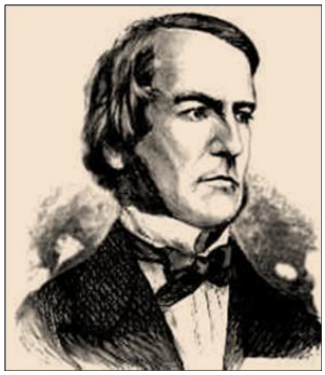
7. GEORGE BOOLE (1815-1864)

In a world in which our lives have become increasingly subject to control by computers, most of us submit to their influence because unable to understand their true significance or how to escape being so-controlled, even if we wanted to be. The experience gained of other technological advances - from steam engines and telephones to aeroplanes and television - will have taught us that all such developments are 'two-edged swords' - the adverse effects perhaps most readily apparent in military weaponry or the fake news disseminated via 'social' media. And yet - it is important to recognise the good intentions of those whose ingenuity led to the fundamental knowledge, which was subsequently applied to humanitarian aims such as improved medicines, efficient transport and safer and nutritious food.

George Boole qualifies as a prime example, both because of his scientific genius and, consistent with other local notables who featured in earlier issues, he grew up in Lincoln. The son of a shoemaker, his only formal education was through attendance at Lincoln elementary schools, for thereafter he was essentially self-taught. When sixteen, he was employed as a teacher, but at twenty opened a school on his own account, where, in his spare time, he studied Greek, Latin, French, German and Italian. Surprisingly, it was only later that he became interested in mathematics - but then to an unprecedented degree.



His first steps in this transition were to read seminal works, including *Principia: the mathematical principles of natural philosophy* by Isaac Newton (another Lincolnshire luminary) and then immerse himself in journals stocked at *Lincoln's Mechanics Institute.* Starting in 1841, he began to submit a stream of original papers to the, recently founded, *Cambridge Mathematical Journal* - the first being entitled *Researches on the Theory of Analytical Transformations.* There followed many papers on differential equations and the algebraic problem of linear transformation, emphasising the concept of invariance.

Doubtless, few of us can appreciate how important these ideas were - but we may be content to accept the assessment of the famous philosopher Bertrand Russell, who described Boole as the ***founder of pure mathematics***, while Professor Ian Stewart FRS describes him as ***one of the most influential intellectuals of the era.*** His important paper *On a General Method of Analysis*, published in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, considered how his algebra could also be applied in logic. It was awarded the Royal Society's first gold medal for mathematics in 1844. In that year, he was appointed Professor of Mathematics at Queens College in Cork, where he continued to work until his sudden death when forty nine.

Although few of us can fully understand his achievements, his *Boolian Logic* is the basis of modern computers; and the better-known Alan Turing developed Boole's ideas in designing the first digital computer. Moreover, he has been described as a *practical scientist, psychiatrist, social reformer, humanitarian, religious thinker* and *family man* - he and his wife being the parents of five girls. A veritable polymath, he is probably best known for his book *The Laws of Thought.*

Sources of reference: *The Life and Work of George Boole*: D MacHale (2014) Cork UP
J Ketteringham (1995) Lincolnshire People, Kings England Press; Quotes are in *italics*

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8. OCTOGENARIAL REFLECTIONS PART 2

In our postmodern age ...the human subject has become a postman circulating postcards in an endless communications network without sender and without addressee. So, as claimed by philosopher Hannah Arendt, the most fitting answer to the question 'who is the author or agent?' is to tell the story of a life [9]

In part 1 of this series (in Issue 21) I related the events which first drew me to philosophical reflection. Within a short time, this had spread to pose many questions which continue to occupy my thoughts - but now often with a deeper understanding of what might amount to valid answers. In the phrase Philip Larkin used in the title of one of his books of poetry, I have become *less deceived*. An important reason for this is the realisation that everything we think we 'know' is subject to the ways our minds translate, process, filter or distort the incoming stimuli perceived by our five senses - sight, sound etc. And there is growing evidence that the mind is not only a product of brain activity, which is important in integrating these stimuli, but also of the intestinal tract, to the extent that some scientists call the gut the 'second brain.' Thus, our biology plays a crucial role in interpreting mental experiences, challenging the assumption that we can ever be completely objective. Consequently, two questions underlying my lifelong mental reflections are *what is the nature of the 'I' that is the assumed source of all our beliefs* and on *what forms of evidence do such beliefs depend*? I apologise for the apparent egocentricity, but it's inevitable in following Arendt's invocation.

Shakespeare, in *As you Like It*, portrayed life as comprising *seven ages*, but as he only lived for 52 years, whereas now in the UK our expected life span at birth is over 80 years, we might want to recast his sequence. In my case, I suggest grouping the ages in periods of, roughly, 15, 10, 10, 10, 20, 10 and 10 + years. But two underlying influences, namely *nature* and *nurture*, i.e. the impacts of our *genetic* inheritance and the *environment* we have been exposed to, play varying roles during those periods.

Having reflected on my first fifteen years in Issue 21, I now aim to consider, from a personal perspective, the second of the proposed 'ages' - the period from 15 to 25 years. The transformation from dependent childhood to independent adulthood, over a period of just ten years, is surely remarkable - sometimes encompassing parenthood, prominent social or managerial roles, academic or artistic achievements, but equally in countless other ways which almost everybody experiences at that age. Physical maturation, sexuality, political persuasion and challenges to authority are all developments triggered by our biological nature. Instances of how I weathered this physiological/psychological maelstrom might illustrate how my future life was shaped by this period.

After my O levels at Hartlebury, I moved to Worcester Royal Grammar School, founded in the 16th century and having aspirations to public school status - with some

[9] Source: *Ethics and the Narrative Self* by Richard Kearney

boarders and straw hats in summer! I found the teaching formal and dull, leaving me to resort to mugging up for A level exams by private study. The main benefit of my attendance there was an unexamined ancillary course on modern poetry, which opened up a lifelong appreciation. My previously-identified nonconformity was exemplified by refusal to join the Combined Cadet Force on the grounds of my declared pacifism. And although that might have appeared whimpish, it was offset by my selection for the school's rugby XV and the sports master's description of me in the school magazine as 'fast and fearless.'[10] But one rugby match that left its indelible mark was that in which a boy on our side was tackled and, there and then, on the pitch, died of a heart attack. I wrote a poem about it, but could not share the tragedy at home because my mother was caring for my sick father, whose work meant he was then living in digs in Lincoln, and in those days we had no telephones.

Annually, a few boys went to Oxbridge colleges, which involved them returning to school after A levels to prepare for the entrance exams, and it was suggested that I should do this. But my father's poor heath meant he had to retire from his job so that, on a meagre pension, my parents couldn't support me for an extra year. The staff didn't seem interested in boys wanting to go to other universities, so it was by pure chance that I found a leaflet advertising a course in physiology at University College London (UCL). Without hesitation, I applied, and was invited to go for an interview and take two examination papers. There were only twelve places for this BSc course - one of which I secured.[11] How swift and informal it was compared with today's procedures!

I hadn't previously travelled far from home, so living in London was exhilarating and not a little daunting. But I had a stroke of luck in securing accommodation at New College in Hampstead (NC), a theological college of the university for students (of course, all male) aiming to be ministers in the Congregational Church. Numbers of theology students, even in 1958, were falling, so they offered accommodation for some students from other colleges. In fact, it was such a convenient and congenial place, that I lived there for all three years of my physiology course, and was thus exposed to contrasting environments - a religious ethos on the one hand and, on the other, that of the 'godless college of Gower Street' (so dubbed at Oxford where a religious affiliation was earlier required).

Although the theology of New College (actually founded in 1850) wasn't my 'cup of tea,' its outlook was liberal and scholastic, and with its quad, chapel, dining hall, common rooms and excellent library it typified the architectural style of other small university colleges at that time. Most of the 'theologs' were older (e.g. in their 30's

[10] I was also awarded *Worcestershire County Colours* for my achievements in athletics

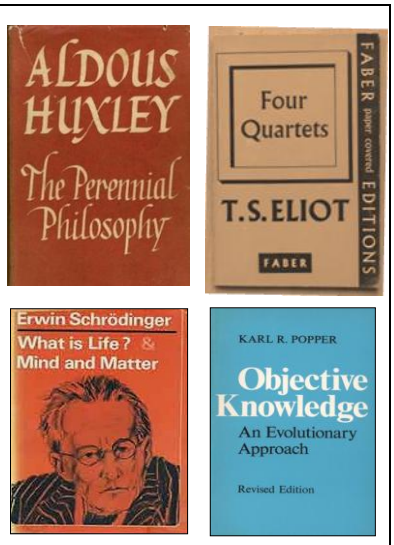
[11] As an undergraduate, academic fees and accommodation were paid by a 'County Major award' and I had a grant of £300 p.a. to live on, e.g. travel, books, clothes, etc.

and 40s) than the usual undergraduate in other colleges, which made for interesting discussion and debate, and I count this as an important element of my intellectual reasoning. NC's environs were also congenial, with the 'town' having a distinctly villagey character and Hampstead Heath imparting a unique rural ambience, surrounding the urban scene.

UCL proved as stimulating and educational an establishment as I could have imagined, and the twelve students taking the BSc course (six of each gender) were a diverse and friendly group. Several of the staff were very distinguished, with two of them, Bernard Katz and Andrew Huxley, being awarded Nobel Prizes for Physiology or Medicine. When he was head of the department, Huxley offered me a PhD studentship in gastroenterology. But this was problematical because I had already been offered a permanent position at the government-sponsored Institute of Animal Physiology (IAP) at Cambridge, which appealed to me because it was in my specialist field of biochemistry. Should I go for the prestigious Huxley offer, or a significantly higher salary at the Cambridge institute?

The decision, for the latter, was effectively made by someone else - my fiancée (as known in those days). I had known S from soon after I left school and we got engaged (both at twenty) a year before graduating. She persuaded me that living in London on £450 p.a. was not feasible for a married couple. So I opted for Cambridge, which had impressed me on an earlier visit. But before moving, my run of good luck appeared to falter. I had not been well during my final year, suffering from a neurological condition that frequently led to uncontrolled muscular spasms in my right shoulder. After fobbing it off as exam nerves, with the exams then finished I sought medical advice, and within two weeks, was undergoing an operation at St Thomas' Hospital in London for removal of a, fortunately benign, tumour (on the 5^{th} cervical vertebra) by the eminent surgeon Mr Harvey Jackson. In recovery I was relieved and blissfully happy, from a veranda viewing the Houses of Parliament across the sunlit Thames and attended by charming nurses directed by Sister Fortune, a veritable Florence Nightingale look-alike! But, ironically, the close relationship with S, which in retrospect had been established too hastily, didn't last and we parted a year later.

When at UCL, in addition to the science course, that pursued the reductionist approach which has since, dominated research programmes by exploring the genetic and biochemical basis of body systems, I was also delving into quite different studies, illustrated by the four publications shown. And, of course, London provided opportunities to visit parliament, the law courts - and some unique events such as witnessing the 89 year Bertrand Russell who, despite his protests, was being very gently lifted into a police black maria after a sit-down peace protest in Parliament Square!



Examples of my undergrad reading

After my operation, I moved straight to Cambridge. In the early sixties, scientific research often involved building your own necessary equipment. In my case, at the IAP, I had to construct an automated amino acid analyser (based on ion-exchange chromatography) to measure the concentrations of the 20 amino acids in different body fluids, notably blood and (as proteins) milk. My work was divided between that with a small team studying the physiology of lactation and, secondly, my doctoral work which was focused on the synthesis of proteins like casein from the amino acids in the blood stream. From the outset, I found it enthralling, but, as is typical of such research, sometimes challenging when theories didn't work out as anticipated. As at UCL, there were several very distinguished staff at IAP, including the Director, Prof Richard Keynes, who happened to be Darwin's great-grandson. My first full academic paper, of many others on the same theme, was published in the *Biochemical Journal* in 1966.

By the end of my time at UCL, I had developed a liberal approach to religion, which seemed to resonate with aspects of Unitarianism and Quakerism. So it was not surprising that I began to attend the Unitarian Chapel in Cambridge to explore what it meant in practice to be a Unitarian. Of course, the title refers to denial of the concept of the 'holy trinity' and belief that Jesus was solely human, and not divine. But it also adopts a tolerant approach which accepts that, despite the fact that each might have a personal emphasis in their religious convictions, their fellows were united in ways which were not prescribed by scriptural fiat.[12] The minister, Stewart Carter, also held weekly meetings at his house, where impromptu discussions were often lively. At one, I first met a young nurse, Ann, who had trained at the Middlesex Hospital in London and was just completing a Midwifery course in Cambridge. In short, a whirlwind attraction resulted in our marriage, in 1963, at a Unitarian chapel in Sussex: We initially rented a flat in Cambridge and then moved to a house adjacent to the IAP campus. Both of us were in no doubt that our getting married was the right decision.

About a year later, Stewart Carter asked me if I would convene and chair a group from the congregation to discuss and report on our views about the future of *Unitarianism in the modern world*, as a contribution to the national debate. Not a little flattered, but confident that I could do it, I arranged for a group of about 12 people, to meet weekly and respond to a series of questions posed by the national board. Some

[12] *Some notable Unitarians*: Louisa May Alcott, Alexander Graham Bell, Tim Berners-Lee, e e cummings, Charles Darwin. Charles Dickens, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Elizabeth Gaskell, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Isaac Newton, Florence Nightingale, Beatrix Potter, Joseph Priestley, Albert Schweitzer, Henry David Thoreau, Josiah Wedgwood, Mary Wollstonecraft.

were academics from the University, and one became the master of one of the colleges, so it was a challenge to produce a prestigious report at such a tender age.

In 1965, our first child, James, was born. By choice, the birth took place at home, but not altogether smoothly. With Ann going into labour - and well versed in what to do and when - I ran to the public phone box about 200 yards away to call the district midwife. She seemed drowsy, but assured me she would come soon. Four hours later, at about 3 am, she had still not arrived. The dilemma, without a phone, was whether to wait longer - or take the risk of leaving Ann alone while I sprinted to the call box again. The latter proved necessary, and the midwife, who had overslept, arrived soon. But contrary to protocol, I was actively involved because our second-hand bed, with its creaking, uneven springs needed much physical effort from me to hold it together under Ann's exertions. Otherwise, all three of us fared well.

Analysis What can I deduce about the 'I' mentioned in the first paragraph? Both genes and environmental factors are clearly influences, but perhaps the former to a greater extent when younger. Many events that were *contingent* on random or unforeseen influences, bred in me a stoical inclination. For example, initial plans were frustrated by my father's illness, a broken engagement, a major surgical operation and by the need to make a snap decision on where to further my academic studies. But the quest to identify 'I' in metaphysical terms - as presumably conceived by most *believers* - had not really revealed a basis for a more satisfactory philosophy of mind, which remained challenging. I inherited confidence and rhetorical skills from my father and a positive determination to follow a decided course of action from my mother, but these were influences which *shaped* my character rather than intimated its essence.

In terms of Christian theology, in this biographical period, i) I considered Unitarianism more credible than the notion of the Trinity; ii) it seemed hypocritical to consider the key moral guidance typified in phrases such as *love thy neighbour as thyself* and *turn the other cheek* was compatible with endorsement, and even sanctification, of warfare; as was iii) appeal to dogmas which were claimed to justify the persecution of 'dissenters' e.g., prominently then, on the island of Ireland.

From that time, I have answered the question *Do you believe in God?* with *No,* if I think my questioner does, and *Yes* if I think they don't ! So different are the ways in which God is envisioned, that the question posed is meaningless without clarification. Even so, I was becoming persuaded that *focused meditation*, including the influence of certain Eastern philosophies, as discussed in the book shown above by Aldous Huxley (half brother to Andrew), was more consistent with humanity's ever-expanding scientific appreciation of both the universe and our human nature.

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